

INTRODUCTION

Communication. It's what connects us as humans.

Through it, we express our ideas and thoughts to each other; we listen and respond. We share our aspirations, hopes and longings. We express our fears, our responses to the world around us.

In all our most significant interactions, communication is at the heart of everything that makes us human.

Without good communication, chaos can and often does ensure.

Nations go to war; relationships end acrimoniously; communities remain divided and regional peace is elusive.

Hence, we need to improve, as much as we can, our ability to communicate, irrespective of the context.

If your business is speaking to persuade, to call people to action, etc, then the bridge between mediocre and excellent communication will have to be crossed if you are to excel in transferring what is in your mind and heart to your audience.

My experience in both speaking and analysing effective communication has come through a background in leadership

in spiritual communities and as an entrepreneur and business coach.

To fulfil these roles, I have had to learn what works and what should be avoided to better connect with audiences and get my point across.

Consequently, I have learnt many key things about good speaking but I have been profoundly affected by good communicators, from whom I collected thoughts and noted what it was that connected me to them; why, how, what is the key, what are the psychological principles at work?

I will get you from good to great; from ambiguous to crystal clear; from misunderstanding to absolute clarity, no mistake about what you mean.

With some shifts in how you prepare your material and more importantly, yourself, you can make massive progress in any and every area of communication.

Therefore, all I will show you, is absolutely achievable, if you apply what you learn.

How much waffle have to we had to sit through over the course of our lives?

How much have we had to endure listening to dusty discourse, weighed down with excessive information, fired without aim toward us like a crude mortar, hoping something is going to stick on us in the path of trajectory?

I could labour the metaphor but it should be clear that a random approach to speaking or indeed any form of communication will never succeed unless we understand more on what makes effective communication effective.

What follows in the early chapters of this small book are well researched techniques for improving the 'how' of communication; how to recognise the superfluous and how best to

organise your thoughts to the intended action goals you have in mind for your intended audience.

But technique is a small part of the story and actually less important than other elements that make a message memorable and hit the mark.

This means getting to the nub of the issue, how do you distill everything down into a single core concept: easy to state, easy to communicate, easy to listen to and therefore, easy to understand and act upon.

In this book, I introduce what I call, **‘THE BIG IDEA’** and it is at the centre of all excellent communication and the success behind every major communicator past and present.

I then go beyond the mechanics and techniques of speaking into what I believe is the most important yet most ignored factor in many communicators training: the speaker themselves.

Too much time can be spent on honing technique but we ignore the channel through which the message must come!

You will find out how you are the most important element in your message. In fact, you are the message!

First, let's clear up a few popular and unhelpful misconceptions....

CHAPTER 1

WHAT YOU SAY IS NOT WHAT PEOPLE HEAR

I had to learn the hard way: what people heard was not what I had prepared and certainly not what I thought I had said on the occasion.

Therefore people received something different than what I thought I had given them. More often than not, people do not hear what you thought you said. Somewhere there is a breakdown in the lines.

I am not merely talking about wandering from your notes or how attention deficient listeners can be at times.

Many factors can influence the listening experience that are in our favour or oppose it.

What I explicitly mean here is that we all too easily believe that just saying something about what we want to say is sufficient for people to grasp everything you meant to say.

If there is misunderstanding or ambiguity, then it must be on the part of the hearer, not the speaker. After all, the speaker said what he/she was going to say, so why didn't people receive it as spoken?

There are many potential reasons why this may be so but

before we look at the culpability of the listener in a communication failure, we must start with the source of the message and in every case, this is you and me.

If we do not take a robust appraisal of our own methodology, then we will not see our part in the failure of communication.

Agreed, many today have very short spans of attention so we have to do all we can to minimise the chances of being misunderstood and unconvincing.

For me, the majority of the problems lie with us, the communicator.

So let's be clear here: just saying something does not guarantee it will be heard as you said it or what you said, if heard, will be understood.

So as much as it is in our control, we must minimise the things that cause bad communication and maximise the things that promote good communication.

Techniques are important and well documented and applying them will make you a better speaker and I will touch on those shortly.

However, I think the bigger issues are more fundamental than that.

From experience and research, the main reasons why people do not receive what we think we have communicated can be distilled down to the following factors. Not all, but the most important:

a. **No clarity** - You are not clear on what it is exactly that you want to say and therefore you are communicating confusion. [**The Big Idea in Chapter 3**]. You may say it with passion, conviction and perfect pronunciation but it is not concise enough.

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b. **Information overload** - there is simply too much being transmitted. Combine this with a. and you have a lot of aural activity but it is simply discarded by the receiver as noise.

c. **Assumed too much** - You wrongly assume that everybody is where you are with your understanding and start on that assumption. But people have not walked the same path of acquisition as you have or we may be dealing with a complex topic that few, if any, understand.

Even among peers in the same industry or same work setting may struggle to fully 'get it' as you wrongly assume.

That just because they may understand a bit of what you say it must follow the rest should be understood easily as a matter of course.

There are many highly gifted and knowledgeable people but they struggle to articulate that knowledge so that others can benefit from it.

However, we also have science educators such as Brian Cox and Michio Kaku who are able to breakdown very complex theoretical and scientific concepts for public consumption in way that the essentials can be appreciated if not the bigger picture grasped.

Fortunately, the weaknesses, a. through c. listed above, can be overcome and that is what I will cover in the following chapters.

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I listen to a lot of podcasts, talks, seminars, speeches. I am curious and hungry for knowledge and I get excited about hearing a new idea from someone who is bringing into to the table.

But often, I walk away trying to assess what it was that was actually said!

The same could be said for the countless sermons heard over the years that I thought were really good, but on private reflection, I could not remember a single point or call to action. Not one.

I have heard stories, humour, anecdotes and been entertained but cannot easily put my finger on what the actual message was centred on and therefore, what I am being asked to do as a consequence.

I remember times when people thanked me for a sermon given. Once I rather cheekily asked the appreciative person what the sermon was about. I was told by said person that they could not remember but it was funny whatever it was!

Something was communicated but clearly what I thought I had said was not the thing received by the listener.

It must be said frankly that this is the scenario week-in, week-out in churches, meetings, work seminars, etc.

Now, sometimes, there is not a call to action, the message is merely informative and designed to enlighten us about a subject or issue and so we only need to assimilate the things we have heard for the speaker to have succeeded. If we can.

However, even a generic stream of facts is hard to absorb and arrange in your mind without some structure and over-riding concept.

Therefore, getting the knowledge arranged in an effective way becomes paramount if we are to minimise factors that impede good communication.

We must always assume the corrective measures start with

us - we must do all we can with ourselves to ensure others will get what we say; first time, every time.

Of course, there are mitigating circumstances when it comes to the listener that may and often do prevent understanding.

These may include: poor acoustics, tiredness, lighting, language barriers, prejudice, over-familiarity with topic, close-minded, etc.

There are endless barriers you could be up against, hence whatever you can do to remove these, do.

We may be able to deal with some of those externals and we should: we should do all we can to ensure the successful transmission of our message, our ideas, our thoughts to others.

So, let's just touch on some of the aspects of communication called 'Techniques' which most people deal with in regard to improving general and public speaking. They are important but not everything, and often eclipse other factors that go much further than mere technique.

Of that, we shall cover later.

